

STILL A TOP PRIORITY FOR STATE

# War on drugs 'marches on'

The Advertiser's March 7 editorial asked the question, "What ever happened to the war on ice?" Simply put, the battle against all illicit drugs and underage drinking in Hawai'i has been marching on, steadily and unabated.

With the commitment and dedication of countless individuals and organizations in our community, the Lingle-Aiona administration continues to make controlling illegal drug use and underage drinking a top priority.

The state's Drug Control Plan calls for a coordinated and comprehensive approach to combat drugs through aggressive and effective prevention, accessible and quality treatment and vigorous law enforcement. The editorial's characterization that our administration favors law enforcement over prevention and treatment is wrong.

We have implemented numerous prevention programs targeting young people, including:

- About Face, an after-school program for low-income, at-risk youth which provides academic, occupational and life skills training.
- Uplinks, another after-school program providing alternative learning activities to middle school youth.
- Protecting You, Protecting Me, an in-school peer mentoring program designed to fill the gap in current prevention programs.

We also have secured more than \$5.58 million in federal and state funds to expand existing youth service center programs and establish other programs which help adolescents maintain safe and healthy lifestyles.

Additionally, many fifth-grade classes across the state have benefited from Teach-Ins, a nation-

al program where local community leaders, celebrities and athletes go into the classrooms to speak to students on the harmful effects of alcohol and the importance of making positive choices.

We also implemented direct social marketing strategies and programs addressing the danger of drugs and alcohol through successful TV commercials featuring young adult role models.

In the area of treatment, we obtained a \$3.6 million federal grant to improve the delivery of services to persons with co-occurring mental health and substance abuse disorders. We have increased the capacity of community treatment facilities and programs, and we are aggressively seeking to increase the number of certified substance abuse counselors.

And for the first time, all state agencies offering treatment services are now working together to coordinate and review their respective programs and come up with uniform data collection and reporting procedures, common performance outcome measures and standard monitoring and evaluation practices.

In the current legislative session, we have introduced legislation to establish screening and briefing intervention programs in hospital emergency rooms, a "best practices" program in the treatment and prevention fields.

We stand firm in our belief that the law enforcement community should be given all the proper tools and resources to combat the scourge of illicit



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drugs in our streets and neighborhoods and that laws should be toughened to make it particularly harsh for criminals who manufacture, distribute, sell, or promote this poison.

We note that The Advertiser's editorial was "encouraged" by the recent rider included in the Patriot Act, which would restrict and regulate the availability of pseudoephedrine, a key ingredient in the manufacture of methamphetamine.

We have also responded to the community's call to help them in their neighborhood through the establishment of the Attorney General's Drug Nuisance Abatement Unit, which has handled over 800 complaints regarding illegal drug activities and drug houses. We are also establishing formal Drug Endangered Children protocols to guide first responders on how to handle children discovered in drug-related environments.

No, the "fire" to combat illicit drugs and underage drinking has not "gone out" by any means, as your editorial mistakenly suggests. It is unfortunate that your editorial doesn't recognize the existence and tireless effort of the many "drug-fighters from the community level" who educate our kids about the dangers of drugs, who work with addicts on the road to recovery and who seek out and arrest the criminal element responsible for our drug problems.

This administration, however, does recognize all that they do.

Indeed, the war on drugs in Hawai'i has been marching on. It will be won through tireless, coordinated and comprehensive efforts to change people's lives — one at a time.

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Lieutenant governor